

Painting Chapter 8



Art Nouveau

Art Nouveau

(1880-1914)



Art Nouveau flourished as an art movement from the 1880s to 1910s. This movement tried to be an art that would break all connections to classical times, and bring down the barriers between the fine arts¹ and applied arts². Art Nouveau was more than a mere style. It was a way of thinking about modern society and new production methods. It was an attempt to redefine the meaning and nature of the work of art. From that time on, it was the duty of art not to overlook any everyday object, no matter how utilitarian it might be. This approach was considered completely new and revolutionary, thus the name Art Nouveau which means New Art.

In this new movement, it was thought that an artist should work on everything from architecture to furniture design so that art would become a part of everyday life. By making beauty and harmony a part of everyday life, artists made people's lives better. This approach has been represented in painting, architecture, furniture, glassware, graphic design, jewelry, pottery, metalwork, and textiles and sculpture. Advertising posters were welcomed into art, and fence has been proclaimed a

suitable exhibition place for this new art. This was a sharp contrast to the traditional separation of art into the distinct categories of fine art (painting and sculpture) and applied arts (ceramics, furniture, and other practical objects).

Because of typical flat, decorative patterns used in all art forms, Art Nouveau obtained a nickname 'the noodle style' in French. Visual standards of the Art Nouveau style are flat, decorative patterns, intertwined organic forms of stems or flowers. Art Nouveau emphasized handcrafting as opposed to machine manufacturing, the use of new materials. Although curving lines characterize Art Nouveau, right-angled forms are also typical, especially as the style was



¹ artistic work that is meant to be appreciated for its own sake, rather than to serve some useful function

² Works that are considered craft, such as furniture design or graphic design, among others.

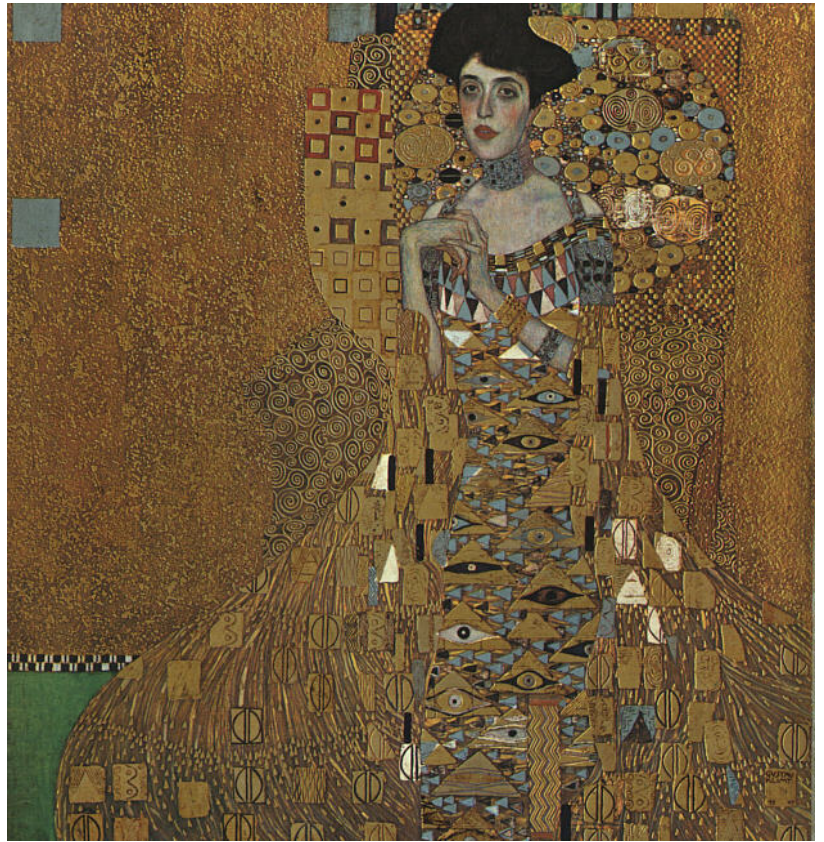
practiced in Scotland and in Austria.

Typical for this style was artistic application of modern industrial techniques and modern materials (unmasked iron in architecture for example). Principal subjects are lavish birds and flowers, insects and the femme fatale. Abstract lines and shapes are used widely as a filling for recognizable subject matter. Purposeful elimination of three-dimensions is often applied through reduced shading. Art Nouveau artifacts are beautiful objects of art, but not necessarily very functional.

Art Nouveau flourished in a number of European countries, many of which developed their own names for the style. Art Nouveau was known in France as style Guimard, after French designer Hector Guimard; in Italy as the stile Floreale

(floral style); stile Liberty, after British Art Nouveau designer Arthur Lasenby Liberty; in Spain as Modernisme; in Austria as Sezessionstil (Vienna Secession); and in Germany as Jugendstil.

Art Nouveau had its deepest influence on a variety of art and design movements that continued to explore integrated design, including De Stijl, a Dutch design movement in the 1920s, and the German Bauhaus school in the 1920s and 1930s.



How to Identify Art Nouveau Paintings

The style known as Art Nouveau became popular at the turn of the 20th century. Though its most often tied to architecture and the decorative arts, at the turn of the century, the movement was all encompassing and included painting and the graphic arts as well as furniture and interior design.

How to Identify Art Nouveau Paintings

1. Know that the most recognizable characteristic of Art Nouveau paintings is the use of curvilinear³ form. These paintings exhibited sinewy⁴ lines that seem to move across the canvas. Think plant shapes and vines found in nature.

³ Wavy, rounded, curvy

⁴ Thin and strong

2. Recognize that natural forms are integral to Art Nouveau painting. The flow and curve of flower petals, the dramatic height of lean-stemmed plants and the undulating sweep of windswept landscapes are inspirational to the Art Nouveau style. But these forms are expressed in the abstract; **realism is the influence of Art Nouveau but is not the goal.**
3. Know that Symbolist art was influential on Art Nouveau painters. Though you need not search out the symbolic meaning of elements in an Art Nouveau painting to appreciate it, understanding that the distortions of reality (such as elongated figures) are representative of cultural mores does aid in identifying the style.
4. Learn that natural elements, particularly flowers, and beautiful women were dominant elements in Art Nouveau paintings. Both women (and men) and flowers were exaggerated in form. Gustav Klimt's paintings best represent this characteristic. His now iconic "The Kiss" is *the* quintessential Art Nouveau painting.
5. Realize that Art Nouveau painters were also influenced by Asian art and specifically Japanese art. The clean lines combined with intricate scrollwork common to Japanese art are easily recognizable in the Art Nouveau style.



Gustav Klimt **1862-1918**

Gustav Klimt was an Austrian Symbolist painter and the most prominent members of the Art Nouveau movement. Klimt's primary subject was the female body, whether formal portraits or nudes. Art historians note an eclectic range of influences contributing to Klimt's distinct style, including Egyptian, Minoan, Classical Greek, and Byzantine inspirations.

Klimt's work had a strong influence on the paintings of Egon Schiele, whom he would collaborate with, to found the Kunsthal (Hall of Art) in 1917, to try and keep local artists from going from Austria.

Klimt was born in Baumgarten, near Vienna, Austria. Gustav was enrolled, at 14, in the Vienna School of Arts and Crafts, and received training as an architectural decorator. He began his

professional career painting interior murals in large public buildings on the Ringstraße. In 1888 he received the Golden order of Merit from Emperor Franz Josef I of Austria for his contributions to art. He also became an honorary member of the University of Munich and the University of Vienna.

Klimt was one of the founding members and president of the Wiener Sezession (Vienna Secession or Art Nouveau), and of the group's periodical *Ver Sacrum*. He remained with the Secession until 1908.

On his annual summer holidays with the Flöge family on the shores of Attersee he painted many of his landscapes. These works constitute the only genre aside from the figure paintings that he would paint. They are numerous and of quality, so as to merit a separate appreciation. Formally, the landscapes are characterized by the same refinement of design and emphatic patterning as the figural pieces. Deep space in these works is so efficiently flattened to a single plane, so it is believed that Klimt used a telescope.

In 1894, Klimt was commissioned to create three paintings to decorate the ceiling of the Great Hall in the University of Vienna: Philosophy, Medicine, and Jurisprudence. They were criticized for their radical themes and graphic subject matter. As a result, they were not displayed on the ceiling of the Great Hall. This would be the last public commission accepted by the artist. All three paintings were eventually destroyed by retreating SS forces in May 1945.



Gustav Klimt's 'Golden Phase' was marked by positive critical reaction and success. Many of his paintings from this period utilized gold leaf; the prominent use of gold can first be traced back to "Pallas Athene" and "Judith I", although the works most popularly associated with this period are the "Portrait of Adele Bloch-Bauer I" and "The Kiss".

In 1911 his painting *Death and Life* received first prize in the world exhibitions in Rome. Gustav Klimt died in Vienna in 1918. Numerous paintings were left unfinished.

Art Nouveau Questions

1. What does Art Nouveau mean?
2. When and where did it exist as an art movement?
3. What were its goals?
4. What two different worlds did they try to combine?
5. What modes were accepted as art during Art Nouveau?
6. Why did Art Nouveau get the nickname, “the Noodle Style”?
7. What do Art Nouveau pieces look like? (What are the visual standards of Art Nouveau?)
8. Which did the Art Nouveau artist favor, handmade objects or machine made?
9. What were the subjects of Art Nouveau pieces?
10. Were they concerned with representing objects in three dimensions?
11. What are curvilinear lines?
12. How is visual realism interpreted by Art Nouveau artists?
13. Are people represented in a perfectly realistic manner at this time?
14. Which is *the* Art Nouveau painting? Who was it by?
15. What culture had a major impact on the development of Art Nouveau?
16. Who was *the* artist of the Art Nouveau movement?
17. Where was he from and what other cultures influenced him?
18. This artist painted two types of paintings. What were they?
19. What did he do to three dimensional space in his works?
20. What was his last major commission as an artist? What was it meant to represent? How was it received?